

Workplace Violence Indicators for Managers



An employee exhibiting the following indicators is not necessarily an individual who is prone to violence; however, violence is always a possibility when these warning signs are evident. These indicators are typical of an employee in difficulty; which strongly suggest that some kind of immediate intervention may be necessary:

1. Excessive tardiness or absences. Beyond simply missing work, an employee may also reduce his or her workday by leaving early, departing the work site without authorization, or presenting numerous excuses for otherwise shortening the workday. This is a particularly significant indicator if it occurs in an individual who has been typically prompt and committed to a full work day.
2. Increased need for supervision. An employee typically requires less supervision as he or she becomes more proficient at their work. An employee who exhibits an increased need for supervision, or with whom the supervisor must spend an inordinate amount of time, may be an individual who is signaling a need for help. Managers should be alert to such a change and consider offering professional intervention if the situation so warrants.
3. Reduced productivity. If a previously efficient and productive employee experiences a sudden or sustained drop in performance, there is reason for concern. This is a classic warning sign of dissatisfaction and the manager should meet with the employee to determine a mutually beneficial course of action.
4. Inconsistency. As in the case of reduced productivity, an employee exhibiting inconsistent work habits may be in need of intervention. Employees are typically quite consistent in their work habits and, should this change, the manager has reason to suspect the individual is in need of assistance.
5. Strained workplace relationships. Many of the classic behavioral warning signs may be identified under this category. Should a worker begin to display disruptive behavior in the workplace it is imperative that the manager intervene as quickly as possible to diffuse a potentially violent situation. This indicator should be taken quite seriously. A worker who exhibits disruptive behavior is in need of immediate counseling and, if appropriate, professional employee assistance.
6. Inability to concentrate. This may indicate a worker who is distracted and in trouble. Employee counseling is indicated.



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7. Violation of safety procedures. This behavior may be due to carelessness, insufficient training or stress. If an employee who has traditionally adhered to safety procedures is suddenly involved in accidents or safety violations, stress may be indicated. This may be a serious situation which requires the intervention of professional employee assistance personnel. Stress is a significant contributor to workplace violence.

8. Changes in health or hygiene. An employee who suddenly disregards personal health or grooming may be signaling for help.

9. Unusual behavior. As mentioned previously, a sustained change in behavior is often an indication of an employee in difficulty. Common sense is the best judge of this issue. Workers are typically quite familiar with the personalities of their peers and are often quick to notice significant changes. The work environment should be managed in such a way as to ensure trust and open communication so that workers undergoing a difficult period may be offered prompt assistance.

10. Fascination with weapons. This is a classic behavioral warning sign that should be easily recognized by coworkers and managers.

11. Substance abuse. This is such a prevalent problem in the American workplace that it has been given separate consideration in this study. It is important that every organization have some methodology in place to identify and assist an employee who has become the victim of drug or alcohol abuse.

12. Stress. Stress is a serious and widespread problem in the workplace. As with substance abuse, an organization should have procedures in place to identify workers who are victims of stress and provide an effective intervention program. The implementation of stress mitigation and personal wellness programs should also be considered by employers.

13. Excuses and blaming. This is a classic behavioral warning sign that is often easy to identify but just as often ignored by managers. A worker who engages in this behavior is often signaling for assistance, requires counseling and, possibly, professional intervention.

14. Depression. Depression is a common ailment in America but not all individuals suffering from depression are prone to violence. If, however, the depression is evident for a sustained period of time, professional intervention is recommended because a violent outcome is always a possibility.

Many of these indicators for managers are alternative ways of interpreting the key behavioral warning signs associated with potential violence. They are almost always warning signs of an employee who requires help. An astute manager will often be quite aware of these indicators through experience and instinct. These tools--experience and instinct--are valuable components of good management and should never be ignored. Any employee who exhibits one or more of these indicators must be assumed to be in need of assistance or intervention. Managers must be alert to these indirect pleas for help and provide a positive, timely response to ensure a safe and secure work environment.

The National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence retrieved October 21, 2008
<http://www.workplaceviolence911.com/servlets/wpvDoc?action=display&key=1205>

Kentucky Employee Assistance Program (KEAP) is dedicated to helping employees find solutions to the personal problems that may hinder their effectiveness at work. Some of KEAP services include:

- Crisis Intervention: When critical incidents or workplace trauma occur, the EAP can provide crisis response. Crisis debriefings provide individuals with information about possible reactions that may follow a critical incident. A structured environment allows individuals to discuss their thoughts and reactions to the incident.
- Management Consultation: Supervisors may consult with EAP professionals for guidance regarding employees and difficult workplace situations.

You may contact KEAP at:

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